

## Soft Drinks and School-Age Children

# Tracking a Soft Drink Contract

Tracking a soft drink contract is a serious challenge. Here are the steps to take if you discover a soft drink contract is under consideration for your school or school system.

### **1. Watch out for clues that a soft drink contract is coming to your area.**

- Develop relationships with people in the community and school district office who have connections or a special interest in the school district and know about the activities of the district. Key people to know include food service directors, school business officials, coaches, athletic directors, principals, superintendents, public health nutritionists at the local health department, pediatricians, parents and students.
- Any kind of exclusive agreement must be made through a request for proposal (RFP) process/announcement. Watch for announcements in the paper, through journals or postings on websites or district office bulletin boards.
- Keep tabs of the activities of the school board via the minutes from school board meetings. You can request to have these sent to you. Many districts post them electronically.
- Read the local paper.

### **2. Find out when the contract will be discussed with comments from the public.**

- Each school board is set up differently, but according to NC Statute 33C-143 (1979):
  - All official meetings of a public body shall be open to the public.
  - Anyone is entitled to attend official meetings.
  - Public notice stating the purpose of all official meetings is required.
  - Minutes of official meetings are a part of the public record.
  - A public body may not vote in secret.
  - The media is entitled to broadcast all or part of a meeting that is required to be open.
  - All actions at official meetings must be open and understandable to the public.

### **3. Mobilize your partners and team members.**

- Identify people who have relationships with the school board members who are willing to make personal contact to explain the issues to them and get an indication of where they stand.
- Contact the school district office to get the names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses (if possible) of the board members.
- Send packets of information to the school board members - include the reproducible handouts in this kit, any assessment data you have gathered and letters from parents, constituents and others.

**4. Once the issue is on the school board agenda, organize your team to speak about different concerns regarding the soft drink contract.**

- Use the resources provided in this kit to develop talking points.
- Prepare spokespeople for the media to interview after the school board meeting.

**5. Pitch the story to the media.**

- Create awareness in the community on the implications of the contract.
- Use the media pieces provided in this kit to alert the media.
- The media may create a different tone for the meeting - it can work to your advantage if they are present.

**6. Follow the issue closely by keeping in contact with school board members or school district staff.**

- Follow the local papers and news coverage.
- Identify yourself or someone from your team to serve on any task force or committee that the district has or may decide to establish to set nutrition policies for the district.
- Respond to published stories with letters to the editor.
- If a school board declines the contract, commend them in a public manner (for example a letter to the editor).